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ABSTRACT

This publication presents Montgomery County, Maryland's plan for empowering the educational community by organizing the necessary resources, knowledge, and skills to fulfill the promise of success for every student. The four main goals are: to ensure success for every student; to provide an effective instructional program; to strengthen productive partnerships for everyone; and to create a positive work environment in a self-renewing organization. This report describes the goals and challenges, then examines the following themes: thinking and learning about best practices through action research; the power of attitudes and impact of expectations; shared accountability for qualitative and quantitative performance excellence; and the challenge of learning and using inclusive, collaborative problem solving. It goes on to highlight several trend-benders (initiatives designed to bend a performance trend upward toward a specific goal), including: developing a system of shared accountability; planning to achieve early success; planning to improve workforce excellence; broadening the concept of literacy; reorganizing assets for school success; and creating family- and community-friendly partnerships. (Contains 54 references.) (SM)

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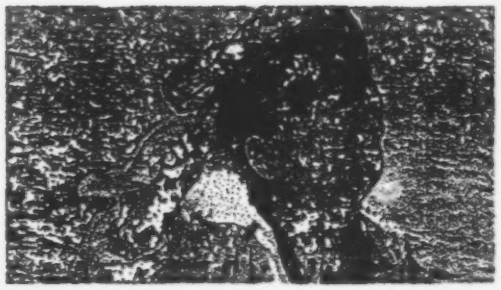
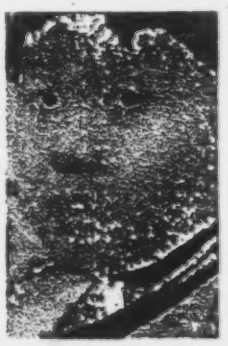
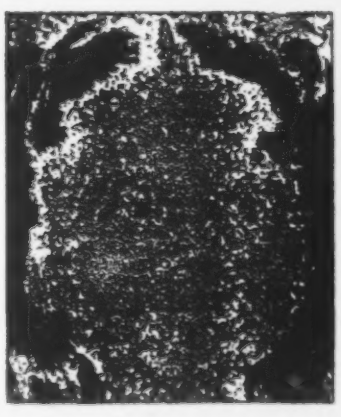


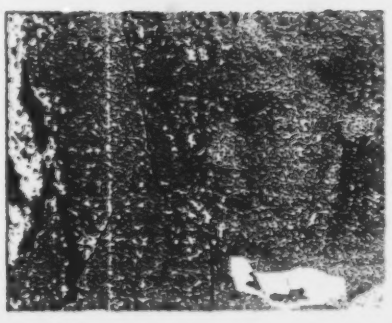


OUR CALL TO ACTION

RAISING THE BAR AND CLOSING THE GAP

BECAUSE ALL CHILDREN MATTER





MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

UD034 317

REVISED NOVEMBER 12, 1999

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OUR CALL TO ACTION

RAISING THE BAR AND CLOSING THE GAP

BECAUSE ALL CHILDREN MATTER

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A Call to Action

NOVEMBER 9, 1999

We have a challenge before us. Student achievement needs to be improved for all students, and the gap in student performance by race and ethnicity needs to be closed. We are committed to using an inclusive, collaborative process to design an effective response to this challenge. The result is *"Our Call to Action: Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap, Because All Children Matter,"* which is our plan to plan. Our intention is to empower the entire educational community of Montgomery County by organizing the necessary resources, knowledge, and skills – and to amass our collective will – to fulfill the promise of Success for Every Student.

The call for this initiative comes directly from students, parents, teachers, principals, central office staff members, community and business leaders, elected county and state officials, and from me. I personally believe there is no more important issue. This report organizes the strategies that have resulted from the willingness of a large number of people to lend their support in achieving the vision and goals of the Board of Education.

The "Academic Milestones" that originated with the Success for Every Student Plan remain the most compelling focus for our efforts. The milestones data indicate the challenge facing this school system when academic achievement remains flat and a significant gap separates many African American and Hispanic students from the highest achievement levels. The recently adopted Academic Priorities of the Board of Education form the guiding framework for the design of this response. We now have the challenge of focusing the direction of our school system, aligning our organizational resources, and inspiring the entire educational community to respond to our call.

We know we have a tough job ahead of us. The potential of this school system to succeed is immense. The complex issues of change for such a diverse and large community are exciting and daunting at the same time. We will need the help of every possible resource and every single employee and community partner to respond with us. Already a great many people have heard this call and promised to respond with solutions.

Respectfully,

Jerry D. Weast
Superintendent of Schools

Ensuring a quality education for every child requires commitment and leadership from all sectors of the community. Schools, county government, businesses, nonprofit providers and the faith community must work hand in hand. We must raise standards and achievement for all students; have high expectations for all students; and provide quality professional development for the teachers, principals, and support staff who are on the front lines of meeting this challenge.

DOUGLAS M. DUNCAN,
MONTGOMERY COUNTY
EXECUTIVE

Students in Montgomery County are dedicated to doing well in standardized tests and in the classroom. We are glad to see this support for the achievement of all students.

DUSTIN JETER,
PRESIDENT,
MONTGOMERY COUNTY
REGION OF THE MARYLAND
ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT
COUNCILS; GRADE 10,
SENECA VALLEY
HIGH SCHOOL

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HAND:
Shared Accountability

HEART:
Attitudes and Expectations

VOICE:
Inclusiveness and Collaboration

MIND:
Thinking and Learning

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Our goal is to fulfill the promise of the Success for Every Student Plan by making sure not only that all students receive a quality education but also that all students are encouraged by everyone to achieve their highest potential. The academic priorities of the Board of Education focus squarely on making our schools more productive for all of our students.

REGINALD M. PELTON,
PRESIDENT,
MONTGOMERY COUNTY
BOARD OF EDUCATION

Board of Education Goals[1]

Goal 1

ENSURE SUCCESS FOR EVERY STUDENT

Provide the services and environment each student needs for intellectual challenge and social and emotional development. Each student will be able to communicate effectively, obtain and use information, solve problems, and engage in active, lifelong learning.

Goal 2

PROVIDE AN EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM

Teach all students a curriculum that describes what they should know and be able to do, includes the many perspectives of a pluralistic society, and establishes learning standards. Instruction must include a variety of teaching strategies and technologies, actively involve students, and result in their mastery of learning objectives.

Goal 3

STRENGTHEN PRODUCTIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR EDUCATION

Secure the commitment of the entire community to maintain quality education in Montgomery County by building partnerships among families, the community, business, and staff that promote and support initiatives to help all children succeed.

Goal 4

CREATE A POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT IN A SELF-RENEWING ORGANIZATION

Develop a climate in which staff effectiveness and creativity are encouraged, respected, valued, and supported to promote productivity and ownership for student success. Provide efficient and effective support and staff development for the instructional program.

Academic Priorities[2]

- ☐ Improve the educational design and delivery of instruction and curriculum by utilization of proven best practices.
- ☑ Develop, expand, and coordinate a literacy-based birth to kindergarten initiative.
- ☐ Create unique, innovative family- and community-friendly partnerships to improve academic results.
- ☐ Organize and optimize assets for improved academic results.
- ☐ Analyze and measure teachers' and principals' effectiveness in improving student performance and results.

[1] Adopted in December 1991, reaffirmed in April 1999.
[2] Adopted in October 1999

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Academic Milestones

The Academic Milestones reflect the constancy of purpose and shared emphasis of the original Success for Every Student Plan, adopted in 1992, and the revised plan of 1999. Each identifies clear outcomes and expectations that measure progress toward specific student goals:

A. All students of each racial/ethnic group will read independently on grade level by the end of Grade 2.

B. All students of each racial/ethnic group will achieve or exceed proficiency standards in mathematics, reading, and writing on local and state assessments.

C. All students of each racial/ethnic group will successfully complete Algebra 1 by the end of Grade 9.

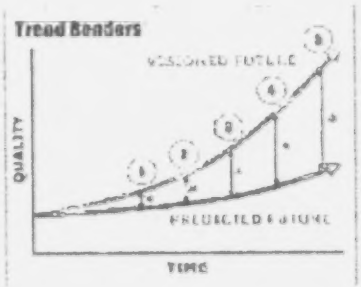
D. All schools will increase participation and performance of students of each racial/ethnic group taking the SAT, with an emphasis on underrepresented populations.

E. All schools will achieve or exceed local and state standards (attendance, promotion, dropouts, functional tests).

F. All schools will increase enrollment and performance of each racial/ethnic group in gifted, Honors, Advanced Placement, and other advanced programs, with an emphasis on underrepresented populations.

G. All schools will eliminate the disproportionate suspension rates of African American and Hispanic students.

H. The school system will eliminate the disproportionate representation of African American students in special education programs.



Building the Call to Action

There has been considerable study, preparation, and collaboration in formulating this response to the challenge of raising student performance and closing the achievement gap by race and ethnicity. The strategies contained in this report are based on educational best practices and research findings.

Trend Benders

A Trend Bender is an initiative designed to bend a performance trend upward toward a specific goal. In this report, all Trend Benders are focused on increasing the academic achievement of all students while accelerating the achievement of African American and Hispanic students.

Integrated Themes

Across the Trend Benders, there are four themes – the need for user-friendly information and data analysis to impact thinking, learning, and problem solving; a focus on the attitudes and expectations required to nurture and optimize learning; the accountability required of every level of the organization and community; and an inclusive, collaborative process for the change.

The single most important issue that we must resolve is raising the level of achievement for all students. We have a diverse population, but we don't want diverse levels of expectation or of education. Every student deserves the same opportunity for high standards of teaching, available resources, and equal expectations of academic results.

ISIAH LEGGETT,
PRESIDENT,
MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL

I do not exaggerate when I say that nothing else even comes close to forecasting our economic vitality into the next century as our ability to close the racial and ethnic achievement gap. If we fail in this, we fail all of us. Of course, the ramifications reach well beyond the economic arena. If we do not remedy the performance disparities we've documented, we will have also failed to deliver on the premise – and promise – of public education: equity and opportunity for all.

NANCY S. GRASMICK,
STATE SUPERINTENDENT
OF SCHOOLS

Vision Statement: Success for Every Student[1]

"We the people of Montgomery County believe that a quality education is a fundamental right of every child. All children will receive the respect, encouragement, and opportunities they need to build the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be successful, contributing members of a changing global society."

[1] Adopted in December 1991, reaffirmed in April 1999.

Introduction

There are *two critical priorities* for public education in Montgomery County at this time.

First, we must raise the bar and close the student academic achievement gap across the school system. We must help all children be more successful and all schools be more productive. The continuing disparity in student achievement by race and ethnicity must be eliminated. It is urgent and morally imperative that we close the gap between the achievement of white and Asian students and that of African American and Hispanic students. There are no easy answers or solutions.

Our Call to Action: Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap, Because All Children Matter helps point in the right direction.

Second, we must do this in a way that creates ownership by all affected constituencies. Different parts of our school system must work together, with one focus. We must share a common definition of the problem. We must collaborate with a sense of urgency and passion, and implement a goal-setting process that involves all constituencies and stakeholders.

A strong and vigorous economy for Montgomery County and the continuation of a high quality of life depend on an educated, skilled, and competent citizenry. Today's students really are tomorrow's workers and leaders. They represent a long-term investment for everyone's future. But the school system cannot act alone. It needs the collaboration of parents and the general public, county and state governments, colleges and universities, advocacy groups and civic organizations, and the business community. All children benefit when we work together.

We begin with certain assumptions.

One: As policy makers, we cannot mandate what matters. We must rely on local capacity and local will. Our instructional staff – teachers, support staff and administrators – must be helped to develop the capability of acting in new ways, and they must be willing to own the changes needed. We must reorganize our resources to meet *their* needs in the classroom.

Two: To encourage ownership and mutual responsibility for problems and solutions, we must put an end to a culture of blame and develop instead a secure environment for risk taking, recognition, and shared accountability. Data must be shared on a

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regular basis throughout the organization. Student achievement and monitoring must begin to inform staff performance measures and form the heart of a system of accountability for everyone.

Three: The quality of teaching makes the difference, and our resources should be focused on all efforts to support teaching and learning. The workforce must receive the resources to strengthen itself and must integrate research and practice, engage in shared inquiry, examine itself, and experiment with new approaches.

Four: Teaching does not take place in a vacuum. The structures and institutional practices embedded in more than a century of public education have much to do with our current failures. We need to consider a variety of factors that contribute to school quality and explore changes that affect school climate, size, student groupings, attitudes and expectations, dispute resolution, and family involvement.

Five: The entire community can respond to our call to action. There are no limitations on the involvement of people who want to help achieve success for every student.

Six: We should be guided in our choices of action by:

- the quality of the research that exists to support new ideas;
- the extent to which the choices have been generated by those closest to the teaching and learning process; and
- our ability to evaluate our success or failure in utilizing a new idea.

Now is the time and this is the place to declare war on the test score gap. It is imperative that we undertake an intellectual mobilization to eliminate this invidious and unacceptable situation.

MICHAEL SUBIN, COUNCIL VICE PRESIDENT; CHAIR, EDUCATION COMMITTEE

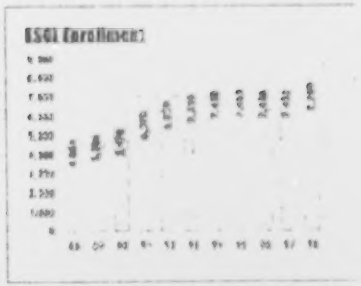
It is imperative that we – parents, teachers, communities, and businesses – support together the Call to Action to improve student performance and to close the achievement gap. Our county's future depends on it.

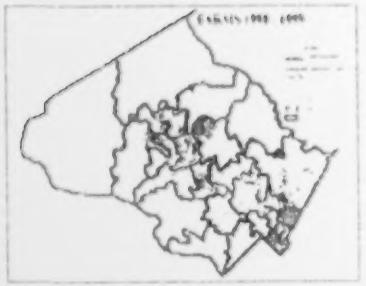
JORGE L. RIBAS, PRESIDENT, MONTGOMERY COUNTY CIVIC FEDERATION

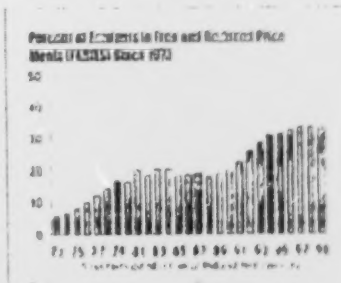
The Changing School System

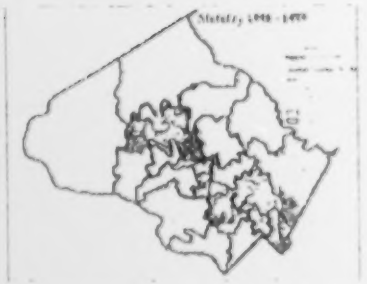
The school system is changing, becoming more diverse, and being challenged in ways that are unique in its history. Indeed, schools within the urban areas of the county's central corridors are distinctly different in composition than schools in the county's outer suburbs.

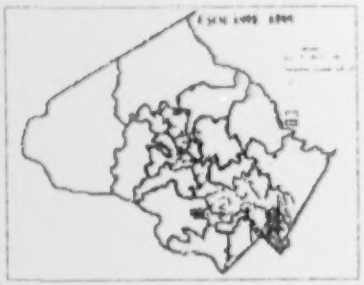
The demographic change is most evident in the core areas of the county, where enrollment is growing, diversity is greater, and the needs of our schools demand significant attention. The maps on this page illustrate the urbanization of the county's major corridors. The darker shades on each map denote the concentration of the highest number of students receiving Free and Reduced-Price Meal Service (FARMS), the highest mobility among students, and the highest number of English Language Learners.











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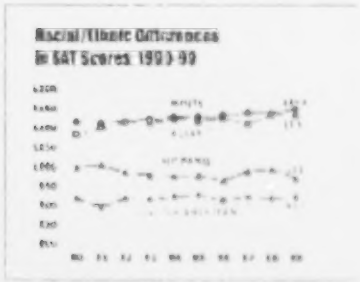

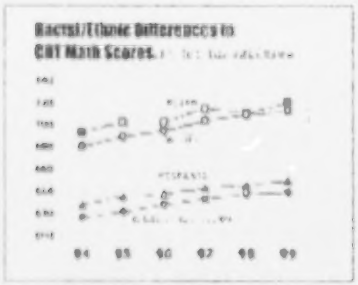

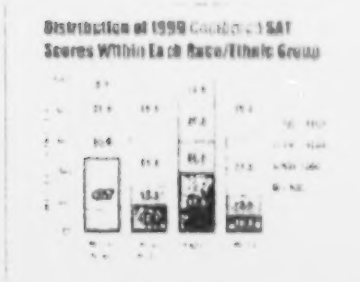

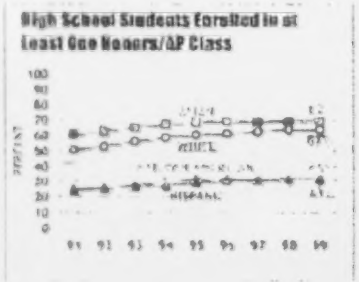

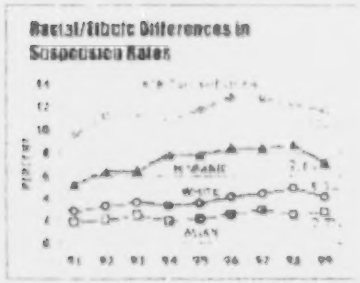

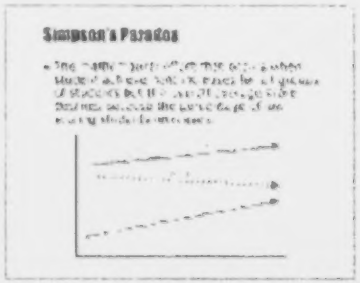

The Gap in Average Student Performance

The gap in student performance by race and ethnicity is most pronounced in the average results for students on major academic assessments, including the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), the distribution of scores on the test, and the Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRTs) in reading and mathematics. Differences are also apparent in special education in certain categories.

The large differences in academic achievement have a definite impact on an assessment of systemwide student performance. This impact can be explained by a mathematical effect called "Simpson's Paradox." The effect occurs when student achievement increases for all groups of students but the overall average score declines because the percentage of low-scoring students rises.

The Parents' Council of the NAACP agrees that it is essential that all stakeholders in the education of our children become partners together to assist the school system in improving student performance. We recognize the importance of identifying the factors that contribute to a child's education and maximizing whatever is identified to meet their needs. We are committed to closing the performance gap.

GWENDOLYN S. HARRIS-GALE, CHAIRMAN, PARENTS' COUNCIL, MONTGOMERY COUNTY BRANCH, NAACP

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There are many well-grounded new prescriptions for educational excellence... My personal list has three items on it: time, expectations, and connections... Students must have enough time to learn... Teachers must believe in the limitless potential of every child... Each student must know at least one adult at the school – a counselor, a teacher, an administrator, a coach, a secretary, even a volunteer tutor – who knows them and is looking out for them. This is difficult to arrange, for it is a matter of the heart. It requires more than increased budgets and revised staffing plans.

JAY MATTHEWS, "VOTING FOR SCHOOLS," THE WASHINGTON POST MAGAZINE (NOVEMBER 7, 1999)

The Goal

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: RAISING THE BAR AND CLOSING THE GAP

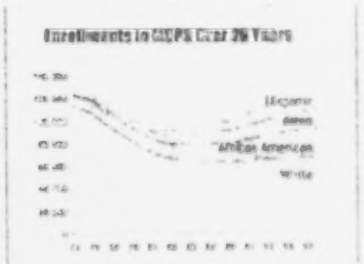
We must raise the academic bar for all students. Improvement in overall student achievement has stalled. The average results on the Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRTs) in reading and mathematics for all students have remained flat or decreased over the past several years. Results on the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) have remained below expectations. Overall average scores on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), while still being the highest in the Washington area and the state, reflect a lack of improvement over time. All students must learn to communicate effectively, read challenging material with understanding, analyze data, and solve complex problems. We must provide a technology-rich instructional program that challenges our students to achieve their potential, opens doors to parents and to the business community, and gives our instructional leaders powerful tools to determine priorities and measure success.

Disparity in student achievement by race and ethnicity is evident in nearly every educational indicator, not only in Montgomery County but also across the nation. The gap in average student achievement between African American and Hispanic students and their white and Asian classmates begins at an early age and continues throughout high school. The divergence is evident in perceived pre-kindergarten skills and continues as students enter first grade. The gap becomes most evident in the CRT results in reading and mathematics in third through eighth grade and sometimes widens over time.

In high school, the disparity is evident in student participation in Honors and Advanced Placement courses. In addition, the 1999 SAT results demonstrate a disparity in performance that has remained nearly constant for the past decade. The percentage of African American and Hispanic students scoring below 900 on the SAT is significantly greater than the percentage of their white and Asian classmates in that score range.

These academic indicators have occurred during a time of significant changes in the student enrollment. The overall number of students has rebounded from the dramatic decreases of the 1980s to reach the highest level in the school system's history. While white student enrollment has remained nearly constant, enrollment has increased among African American, Asian, and Hispanic students. The enrollment is now approximately 50 percent white, after having been more than 90 percent white in the early 1970s.

Other demographic changes include a larger percentage of students receiving Free and Reduced-Price Meal Services (FARMS), rising from less than 5 percent in the early 1970s to more than 30 percent today (when counting all children ever in the program who are enrolled in school). The number of English language learners in Montgomery County represents more than half of all students in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs in the entire state. Approximately 20 percent of MCPS students are current or former ESOL students.



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Achievement for all children is our paramount goal and responsibility. Our white and Asian students, on average, are maintaining some of the highest student performance levels in Maryland and the nation. In fact, achievement data show slight improvement. On the other hand, the data indicate a lack of academic progress for a significant number of African American and Hispanic students. It's time for us to close the gap.

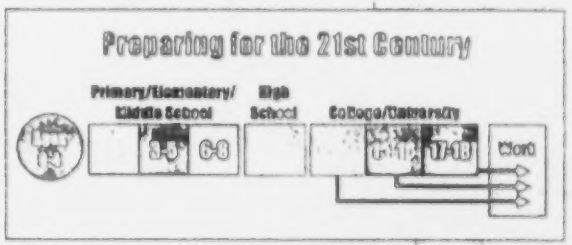
THE PROMISE OF SUCCESS

In 1992, the Montgomery County Public Schools began the implementation of the Success for Every Student Plan and committed the resources of the entire school system to the proposition that "...all children can learn. We do not accept the excuse that students have the right to fail. The right of all students is to succeed." That promise remains just as vital today.

The original four goals of the Success for Every Student Plan continue to be valid. In fact, the Board of Education reaffirmed its commitment to those goals just last spring. The original outcome measures, which have since become "Academic Milestones," reflect the essential elements of the school system's continued focus on ending the disparity in student achievement when disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Many of the key results and performance measures of the plan, which was updated in May 1999, form the basis for the recently adopted "Academic Priorities" of the Board of Education. The renewed collaboration with interagency and community partnerships, such as the Children's Agenda of the Montgomery County government and other parent advocacy initiatives of community and civic organizations, underscores the potential we have for making a real and sustained change.

Our entire community profits when the academic gap between Asian and White students, on the upper end, and Hispanic and African American students, on the lower end, is closed.

ROSCOE R. NIX,
FORMER MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION;
PAST PRESIDENT, MONTGOMERY COUNTY NAACP



We support the Call to Action to raise the achievement of students and close the gap of Hispanic and African American students. We're behind the superintendent and Board of Education 100 percent.

HENRY QUINTERO,
DIRECTOR,
LATINO CIVIL RIGHTS TASK FORCE OF MARYLAND

The Challenge

CREATING OWNERSHIP OF THE PROBLEM AND STRATEGIES

We have an opportunity to do in Montgomery County what no other school system has managed to do. The key will be doing it in partnership with our teachers, principals, support employees, parents, and students.

In organizations where there is a strong culture and commitment to clear purpose and common vision there is a pattern of participatory leadership. If an idea starts at the top, there must be mechanisms for assuring that it flows down through the structure of a system in a compelling form. If an idea starts at the bottom, there must be a means for it to reach the top in a compelling form. If we can commit to participatory leadership, we will have processes for determining whether new ideas or strategies have the potential to spur action, and all who care to be involved will know how their voices can be heard.

Ultimately, the success or failure of our efforts on student achievement will depend on what happens in thousands of individual classrooms and tens of thousands of human interactions. Genuine accountability is undermined to the extent that we take a bureaucratic approach that separates those with authority from those who work with students. Genuine involvement and ownership by everyone is the best approach to creating a collegial climate for change and progress.

School systems across the country that have made progress in restructuring and building more effective organizations have done it by restructuring relationships among teachers, principals, and other staff – including their parent allies – and by supporting them with new organizational structures that allow all these individuals to work together in ways very different from what they once did.

"It isn't the changes that do you in – it's the transitions." *(Bridges, 1991)*

Change is not the same as transition. Change is situational: the new focus, the new boss, the new team roles, the new policy. Transition is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation. Change is external. Transition is internal. The attitudes and expectations that will be critical to optimizing teaching and learning will require us to think, to learn, and to interact in profoundly different ways.

We are committed to working inclusively and collaboratively with all employees, providing a safe place for taking risks, and becoming more accountable. We will use both internal and external sources of increasing our knowledge (know what), advanced skills (know how), systems understanding (know why), and self-motivated creativity (care why). This approach of working smarter through increasing our collective IQ will improve our efforts to lead, manage, and build the culture required for us to be accountable for achieving our shared goals at every level of the school system.

We have a unique responsibility to provide leadership on the challenges we face. Students and their parents deserve Board of Education members, a superintendent, executive staff, principals and administrators, teachers and instructional assistants, counselors, bus operators, cafeteria workers, and all other staff who are committed to the success of all children – building pathways for their success, one step at a time. All those who work in the school system deserve support from parents, students, and the public to help them deliver the best quality educational program possible, every day in every class for every student.

That will mean a fundamental change in the way we do business. Such a change begins with a shared vision and shared responsibility. We must create opportunities to wage a campaign on behalf of the

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children who are most at-risk of poor academic performance. We must challenge all school system employees, parents, and every other person who lives in this county to improve teaching and learning.

This report outlines the first steps of a planned strategy to change the way we do business and revitalize the Montgomery County Public Schools. We will focus on six trend benders so that:

- There is high quality research (nationally and locally) that supports these initiatives
- The ideas underlying the initiatives have been generated in a collaborative manner by key education and community stakeholders
- We can develop meaningful evaluation of these efforts throughout their implementation

THE SIX TREND BENDERS ARE:

1. Developing a System of Shared Accountability
2. Early Success
3. Improving Workforce Excellence
   - Through targeted training
   - Through action research
4. Broadening the Concept of Literacy
5. Reorganizing Assets for School Success
6. Creating Family- and Community-Friendly Partnerships

Critical implications for budget and human resource management are embedded in these initiatives. The capital improvements program will call for the provision of appropriate early childhood and technology programs and for modernization of our facilities. The operating budget will address the need to improve teaching and learning, and the reorganization of the central administration to manage human resources more effectively and focus more resources on schools is already underway.

There are literally thousands of additional research-based innovations, school improvement plans, educational restructuring ideas, best practices, continuous improvement strategies, and action research hypotheses available for consideration. We have brainstormed and explored some of these ideas, and where appropriate, we include them in this document. But the development of an authentic consensus about these ideas among the MCPS workforce and our many interested stakeholders has not yet taken place. That is the next critical task.

In the coming weeks and months, we will flesh out the details of our collaboration – with our Board of Education, employee organizations, parents, community members, researchers, and public officials – to develop an implementation plan that chooses among the myriad of research-based innovations available. We will continue to engage a wide range of employee representatives, community leaders, and others to identify the key problems, quantify them with data, and examine possible strategies. With this report, the first small step of planning for change begins. The parallel processes of employee contract negotiations, the Capital budget, the Capital Improvement Plan, and the operating budget will be critical in identifying and accessing the resources needed for this "call to action."

We must raise the bar for all students, and it is critical that we ensure the highest standards for every student and the implementation of the gifted policy at every school. Parent support and involvement on a daily basis as both student advocates and partners with teachers are critical if we are to expect the best from all of our children.

MARGARET HARE, ADVOCATE FOR GIFTED EDUCATION, FORMER CO-CHAIR OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION

HAND:
Shared Accountability

HEART:
Attitudes and Expectations

MIND:
Thinking and Learning

VOICE:
Inclusiveness and Collaboration

THEMES

Thinking and Learning About Best Practices Through Action Research

Research on effective schools suggests that in successful schools, teachers are engaged in ongoing dialogues about teaching and learning. They critique each other's work, collaborate to design lessons and prepare instructional materials, and investigate best practices together. Successful schools nurture a culture of collegiality, exploration, and risk taking. These norms promote increased growth and development for all students.

Action research is one vehicle for mobilizing and nurturing the professionalism of the workforce through collegiality, exploration, and risk taking. Action research is a shared inquiry process in which teachers collect and analyze data on some aspect of their classroom practice. Following the examination of data, teachers share the findings with colleagues and implement action plans that incorporate their research findings to improve student achievement. Through this process, teachers not only contribute to the knowledge base of the profession but also assume a more active role for student accountability.

The Power of Attitudes and the Impact of Expectations

Attitudes and expectations are powerful factors in determining the academic success of young people. Students achieve based on the expectations set for them by all of the important adults in their lives. Students also react to the expectations of their friends and classmates. All students and adults have a role to play in making sure that all children at all ages are encouraged to succeed academically and to the highest level possible. Communicating positive attitudes and high expectations by everyone is the foundation for student success.

Montgomery County is a truly diverse community. This diversity is increasingly reflected in its schools but not in its academic successes. We still have a long way to go to eliminate the achievement gap based on race and ethnicity. Despite substantial research and a long-standing commitment to eliminating this disparity, we still face significant underachievement among African American and Hispanic students. Yet, our community has the power to change this situation. Students will respond to the positive reinforcement of their ability to be successful.

The call to improve student performance and end the disparity in student achievement includes a call for everyone to improve what is described as our "cultural competence." Personal attitudes and expectations are reflected in the interactions people have with those who belong to racial, ethnic, and cultural groups other than their own. As a community, we have the responsibility to ensure that we acknowledge, respect, and celebrate the diversity of our school system and take great pride in its social richness. Everyone has an obligation to maintain the positive attitudes and expectations for each of our children to ensure that the dream of success for every student becomes a reality.

Shared Accountability for Qualitative and Quantitative Performance Excellence

Imagine entering the cockpit of a modern jet airplane and seeing only a single instrument there. How would you feel about boarding the plane after the following conversation with the pilot?

Q: I'm surprised to see you operating the plane with only a single instrument. What does it measure?

A: Airspeed. I'm really working on airspeed on this flight.

Q: That's good. Airspeed certainly seems important. But what about altitude? Wouldn't an altimeter be helpful?

A: I worked on altitude for the last few flights and I've gotten pretty good on it. Now I have to concentrate on proper airspeed.

Q: But I notice you don't even have a fuel gauge. Wouldn't that be useful?

A: You're right; fuel is significant, but I can't concentrate on doing too many things well at the same time. So on this flight I'm focusing on airspeed. Once I get to be excellent at air speed, as well as altitude, I intend to concentrate on fuel consumption on the next set of flights.

Of course this is a fantasy conversation since no pilot would dream of guiding a complex vehicle like a jet airplane through crowded air spaces, with only a single instrument... Yet navigating today's organizations through complex competitive environments is at least as complicated as flying a jet. (Kaplan and Norton: Translating Strategy into Action: The Balanced Scorecard, HBS Boston, 1976.)

The challenge of raising the bar and closing the gap will require the best in alignment, measurement, and management in the information age. Aligning our goals and our resources and then monitoring our progress with "just in time" information in user-friendly, "actionable" reporting formats will be supported by the rigorous assessment process based on the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. The qualitative and quantitative categories include: Leadership, Strategic Planning, Student and Stakeholder Focus, Information and Analysis, Faculty and Staff Focus, Educational and Support Process Management, and School Performance Results.

Raising the bar and closing the gap is for ALL children – those with special needs, those needing interventions, those in the "All American middle," those taking Honors and Advanced Placement courses, and those in gifted and talented classes throughout the system. A shared system of accountability with up-to-date tools and reports will empower us to make the "just in time" decisions required for optimum teaching and learning to assure the success for each and every student in MCPS.

The Challenge of Learning and Using Inclusive, Collaborative Problem Solving

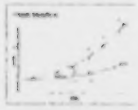
Sometimes the motivated creativity for solutions will come from the top down. More often than not, the self-motivated creativity for solutions will begin at the grassroots and need to make its way up through the system for endorsement and dissemination.

An effective organization creates systems and communication channels that respect the capabilities and requirements of employees and other school stakeholders and sets high expectations for performance and performance improvement.

MCPS will build loyalties and teamwork based on the values and the pursuit of shared purposes. MCPS will encourage and support initiative and risk taking, subordinating organization to purpose and function and avoiding chains of command that require long decision paths. We will use and design systems with built-in mechanisms for self-examination, receipt of feedback, and improvement. (Adapted from *Education Criteria for Performance Excellence*, Baldrige, 1999.)

There are six critical components integral to comprehensive school reform models with potential to turn around low-performing schools: a strong literacy curriculum, extra help, a focus on smallness, parental outreach, and community building, social skills development, and sustained staff development.

SUSAN TALLEY,
WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO REFORM A LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOL?
NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON THE EDUCATION OF AT-RISK STUDENTS, OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IMPROVEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



In order for a school district or school system to truly succeed, all children must do well. The ultimate measurement of success is not only system performance, but also evidence of individual achievement and improvement within each child.

ALAN CHEUNG,
FORMER MEMBER,
BOARD OF EDUCATION

TREND BENDER:

Developing a System of Shared Accountability

To ensure that our students achieve at ever-higher levels of performance, a system of shared accountability for student results at all levels of the school system is essential. We will measure performance by focusing on key student results, countywide and state performance measures and the critical Academic Milestones identified by the Board of Education, as well as the qualitative climate and stakeholder satisfaction and well-being measures.

HOW DO WE PLAN TO IMPROVE?

A well-executed accountability system has several important characteristics. It has clear goals regarding what to improve. It is based in fact and incorporates measures and indicators. It is applied systematically and includes a model of planning, implementation, and evaluation. And it focuses on specific processes as the path to improved results. This approach to improvement must be embedded in the way MCPS operates at all levels.

The work of teaching and learning must continuously be informed by timely, "actionable" data that leads to the analysis of individual student progress on specific proficiency and achievement indicators. The student, the teacher, and the parent need to check regularly to understand where a student is, how much growth is being realized, and what is yet to be accomplished.

Likewise with staff performance, formative and summative reviews must be informed by a data analysis that leads to attaining the knowledge, advanced skills, systems understanding, and self-motivated creativity to teach, to lead, to manage, to work, and to build an MCPS culture focused on learning and improvement at every level of the organization. Only with the appropriate information can the student and teacher, as well as the employee and the supervisor, work to organize the learning and work settings that will optimize attainment of the desired results. Data for all reviews and evaluations must be user-friendly and use indices that regularly report accountability to our stakeholders.

WHY DO WE THINK IT WILL WORK?

We are developing a comprehensive and integrated fact-based accountability system that focuses on student learning. This system will be effective in improving student achievement because it is built on measurement, information, data, and analysis. The measurements will be derived from and support MCPS's vision and goals and will address all key areas for improvement. The system will require valid and stable measures based on uniform standards. Measures will be comprehensive and flexible, and summary composites will be reported in a user-friendly diagnostic format. It will be a tool of continuous improvement, monitoring the alignment and allocation of resources, and evaluation. It will include satisfaction survey data, school climate data, and student performance data. This accountability system focuses on results that reflect the needs and interests of all our students by raising the bar and closing the gap.

What specifically will we do?

To implement an effective model of shared accountability at all levels, two components are needed. The first is an evaluation process for all staff that is linked to MCPS performance measures and the Academic Milestones. This would include support systems, recognition, and incentives for improving student achievement.

At the classroom and teacher level, the focus will be on accelerating the achieve-

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ment of individual students, appraising teacher performance against student results, and setting teaching standards using rubrics that measure teacher quality.

At the school and principal level, the focus expands to accountability for school performance as measured by annual student achievement growth, the number of students meeting performance standards, equity in performance across all racial and ethnic groups, and the quality of student participation, stakeholder and customer satisfaction, and school and class climate.

At the executive, senior, and central office level, the system links accountability for results to performance across the school system by focusing on key student results, school and countywide performance measures and academic progress, securing and allocating needed resources, and the management of educational support services.

Process designs are completed and will be shared for review, refinement, and approval prior to implementation in 2000-2001. The second set of major accountability initiatives will be to develop processes for critically reviewing and regularly reporting progress. Quarterly and annual reviews of students, staff, schools, clusters, central offices, and senior and executive staff performance will be carried out. We will become more proficient in employing accountability strategies that have been proven to support and drive the highest rates of learning.

HOW WILL WE KNOW IF WE HAVE ACHIEVED OUR GOALS?

We will demonstrate our progress and performance with quarterly formative reviews and annual summative reviews according to the following indices:

Academic Proficiency Index represents the percentage of students in a class or school that meet or exceed the established standards.

Equity Index shows the extent to which each of the racial/ethnic groups in the school attains academic proficiency.

Value-Added Productivity identifies schools that produce relatively more student gains from one year to the next year than do other schools.

Quality Index describes levels of participation, climate, and customer/stakeholder satisfaction.

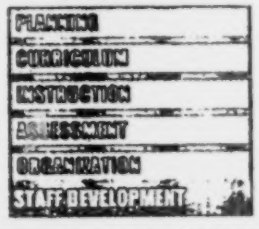
The formative reviews and annual report cards will be completed for each student, class, school, and cluster and for the entire school system according to county and state standards and performance assessment results.

Such an approach to accountability for performance and improvement needs to be embedded in the way the school and the system operate. We must include accountability and improvement as a regular part of our daily work for faculty, all staff, and students; seek to eliminate the problems at their source; and be driven by opportunities to

We work in a business environment where the performance bar is being raised constantly. We should expect our community to have a school system that steadily raises the bar, too. The strength of our community depends creating an environment that challenges and supports every child to reach their potential.

BRAD WESTPFAHL, MARKETING EXECUTIVE, IBM CO-CHAIR, SUPERINTENDENT'S COUNCIL FOR BUSINESS AND EDUCATION

Components of Trend Benders (Best Practices)



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The goal is to create an environment involving students, parents, and teachers where every student can realize his or her full potential.
MICHAEL LIN, CHAIR, GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN AFFAIRS

do better, as well as to correct problems that need to be corrected.

We will:

1. Set high expectations and standards for all students.

2. Learn how to most effectively reflect and adjust our attitudes, behaviors, guidance, and school climate factors to assure each of our students is encouraged, supported, and reaching the highest levels of achievement and performance.

3. Understand that learning rates and styles may differ over time and may vary depending on the subject matter.

4. Develop and use "actionable" information on individual students that directly affects their learning.

5. Use formative assessments to measure progress early in the learning process and then tailor learning to the experiences and individual needs of students.

6. Use summative assessment to measure progress against relevant external standards and norms regarding what students should know and be able to do.

7. Help students and families use self-assessment to chart progress and to clarify goals and gaps.

8. Focus on key transition points, such as school-to-school and school-to-work.

TREND BENDER:
Early Success

School performance depends on learning in the early years, and that learning begins at birth. Given that the performance gap among some students is evident before they enter kindergarten, effective interventions must begin prior to age five.

HOW DO WE PLAN TO ACHIEVE EARLY SUCCESS?

We will establish comprehensive, systemic programs, interventions, and supports for children demonstrating one or more educational at-risk factors, such as English proficiency, high mobility, low income, and special education needs. At the same time, we must value a child's cultural and linguistic background and include the child's family in the educational process.

We will build student success by linking services and resources provided by the schools, other government agencies, businesses, the faith community, community agencies, and families. Services for young children must focus on family literacy and providing support and skill building for parents and all care givers to facilitate the transition from home to

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school for children learning English, living in poverty, or having limited educational experiences. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal law that governs special education for children with disabilities, emphasizes early detection and intervention for children with disabilities and requires that services for these children begin at birth.

WHY DO WE THINK IT WILL WORK?

Nurturing environments that actively engage and stimulate children are vitally necessary. Our challenge is to provide such an environment for all children right from the start. The 21st century will require children to become skilled language users and problem solvers who are cognitively, socially, emotionally, physically, and technologically adept. To prepare our children, we must begin making investments in them at the earliest ages.

Children begin learning as soon as they are born. Experiences during the earliest years of life are crucial to academic performance in school and have effects throughout life. Research on brain development suggests that children learn most quickly and easily during their early years and that brain cells form most of their connections from infancy to age ten.

Research also indicates that early experiences affect student achievement. Thus, the short- and long-term benefits of effective early childhood programs, particularly for children from low-income families, are significant. A recent 21-year study in North Carolina on children from low-income families found that children in high-quality daycare from infancy to age five outperformed peers on reading and math tests and were more than twice as likely to attend college.

Other studies have found that children from low-income families who participated in high-quality preschool programs were significantly less likely to be referred to special education, retained in grade, engaged in crime, or drop out of school. Head Start research clearly indicates that to maintain the early gains, effective transition plans to kindergarten and primary grades must occur. These elements include transition planning, curriculum match, replication of known instructional successes with each child, and availability of material and human resources that match the early childhood instruction.

Another study found that the average number of words heard by young children in an hour varies dramatically across families. The same holds true for English language learners. However, when the vocabulary is in a language other than English, these students face the added burden of learning concepts and a new language at the same time. Research indicates that the stronger a child's mastery of the native language, the more capable the child is in mastering the skills necessary for communicating and gaining literacy in English. These studies clearly show that the early years are critically important to later success in school, especially because researchers agree that the language skills young children bring to school significantly affect how well they learn to read.

What specifically will we do?

We will establish an early childhood program that will increase services to children, from birth through age five, and their families. We are committed to the guiding principles of the Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth, and Families, and our programs will serve as a vehicle for advancing "The Children's Agenda."

The school system will help enhance a coordinated early childhood support and education system in Montgomery County

The most important thing we can do to improve student achievement and close the gap is to put money in pre-K and elementary schools where the foundation is laid for academic achievement for all students.

PHIL GAINOUS, PRINCIPAL, MONTGOMERY BLAIR HIGH SCHOOL

The big picture for all parents is how we can improve teaching and learning for all our children and how we can make sure that all children benefit from a school system that focuses on higher achievement, tougher standards, and more parent involvement.

LUCIE CAMPBELL,
AREA COORDINATOR,
MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL OF PTAS

through systematic and sustained collaboration with families, child-care providers, county agencies, business partners, health care groups, and early childhood advocates. The Early Childhood Committee and the Success by 6 initiative will be the mechanism by which this coordination occurs. Plans for this initiative will include Early Childhood Centers located in critical need areas of Montgomery County and an alliance with families that offers an array of flexible, accessible, and responsive outreach activities, including home-based services that focus on early childhood development, early literacy, and early intervention for children with disabilities.

We will focus on family literacy so that young children become active, engaged readers, writers, and critical thinkers. We will foster the meaningful involvement of families and nurture the social, emotional, and educational well-being of their children. The collaborative efforts of parents, child-care providers, public and private agencies, health care professionals, and the public schools will offer such a range of services. The early childhood program will give our students a smart start, with a family-focused, child-centered, enriched, and accelerated curriculum, and the attendant supports and services from community agencies.

Packets for newborns: Each child is welcomed into the learning community with a *Growing to Learn* packet that contains information for parents on healthy development.

Birth-to-five literacy support: An interagency and community collaboration to support literacy development among families and young children.

Parenting resources and information: Basic parenting education and support for all families, including a mobile "parenting van," that will serve low-income families, teen parents, and families for whom English is not the native language.

"One-stop" parenting resource centers: A single point of entry for parents and families on a regional basis to access education, government, and community services, such as child-care information, parent education, adult and continuing education, college services, library services, special education, student enrollment, translations, child-care referrals, and health care.

Combined training for parents, care givers, and teachers: Classes for adults to learn how to teach young children in homes, centers, and schools and gain a better understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of children.

Rigorous preschool curriculum: Provide a common focus for schools and day-care centers on the developmental levels and language needs of three- to five-year-olds with an emphasis on listening, speaking, reading, writing, and mathematics.

Strengthened kindergarten curriculum: Continue the focus on accelerated instruction in preparation for first grade and beyond. Implement all-day kindergarten programs in the 28 schools with the highest educational load.

Enhance early childhood instruction: Increase student time on task (such as a dedicated literacy instructional block of time), and integrate the use of technology for teaching and learning and development of social and academic skills.

Implement lower student-teacher ratios: Create small classes in Grades 1 and 2 in high impact schools, with ratios of 17 students per teacher to increase achievement in all subjects and reduce special education enrollments, grade retentions, and disciplinary measures.

Keep students and teachers together longer: Implement the "looping" concept

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in schools so that a teacher stays with the same students from one grade level to the next over several years.

Use multi-age and cross-grade grouping: Recognize that children learn at different rates, and regroup students of different ages (usually across two or three years in age difference) in the same classroom.

Implement early childhood assessment: Use a measurement system (combining teacher observations, student work samples, and formal assessments) that provides teachers and parents with frequent information on a child's progress, including benchmarks in language and literacy proficiency.

Bring high technology into the classroom: Provide computer-based materials that can be adjusted to the various strengths and limitations of individual children.

TREND BENDER:

Improved Workforce Excellence

Employees are our most valuable resource. It is essential that each staff member has the knowledge, skills, and attitudes and expectations to affect the optimum learning for each child. We must set competency levels and create staff development experiences that will inform staff and will ensure performance of high proficiency, productivity, and quality.

It is through staff that each of the Board of Education's priority areas can be fulfilled. Building staff competencies is a school-system responsibility, one we have largely overlooked in recent years. It is clear from the data on student achievement that our past lack of investment in our employees contributed to serious gaps in student learning.

HOW DO WE PLAN TO DO THIS?

We must invest in, listen to, trust, and empower our workforce. This focus requires a paradigm shift from limiting leadership to a chosen few to developing a "leaderful" organization – one in which all stakeholders, including students, can lead and share responsibility. All staff must feel empowered to assume leadership and use flexibility to redesign their work processes, set high expectations, and carry out their responsibilities.

Employees also need to learn about the change process itself and anticipate its natural stages. We have a responsibility to communicate clearly and organize for change in a variety of settings: individual, school, cluster/consortium, central support units, and the entire MCPS organization. We will each have to embrace the work and learning required to examine our mental models, the assumptions, and the interactive behaviors required to remove the barriers to new and accelerated learning for ourselves, our colleagues, and the students we serve.

WHY DO WE THINK IT WILL WORK?

The needs of new employees and veteran staff must be addressed appropriately. Staff development must support the achievement of district and school goals. It should link goals to new curricular, instructional, technological, and organizational initiatives, which will entail changes in educational beliefs, teaching behaviors, and the use of materials.

We teach to make a difference, to change lives. Our Call To Action will be read as a commitment to put real resources into what matters most – things that impact the quality of the interaction between teachers and students. We must transform the rhetoric of success for every student into reality. No excuses – just roll up our sleeves, listen to each other's ideas and experiences, and create a learning community in MCPS capable of changing lives and creating opportunity for each and every student.

MARK SIMON,
PRESIDENT OF MCEA

The call to empower parents by involving them in this educational plan to improve the academic performance of all students and close the achievement gap is very commendable. It is critically important to bring the workforce and resources closer to the parents and communities they serve.

DR. GEORGE B. THOMAS, SR., PRESIDENT, GEORGE B. THOMAS LEARNING ACADEMY SATURDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM

Research shows that improvements in instruction result from staff development that is job-embedded and ongoing, addressing the real-life instructional problems that teachers need to solve in their classrooms. Such problem solving includes the ability to analyze data carefully and rigorously in light of instructional goals. Effective professional growth takes time. Time for staff learning must be provided, monitored, and continuously assessed.

We know that the teaching and learning process requires the active involvement of the student. Therefore, the student and the teacher must be co-managers of the teaching and learning process. To increase productivity and achievement, both the student and the teacher must use the latest quality technology in the classroom.

We also know that for this initiative to be successful a vastly increased capacity for training, self-study, data collection, planning, analysis, and research-based action is required. We will use the Baldrige National Quality Criteria to assess our work and performance results.

Research has shown that staff attitudes and expectations affect student performance and motivation. A relationship between a significant adult in a school and a student is essential to learning, particularly for both African American and Hispanic students. Similarly, positive attitudes and expectations that foster a feeling of inclusiveness in students with special learning needs and in English language learners make a difference in how well schools do their job.

Research on "cultural competence" has shown that cultural understanding is built on the ability to see the relationships among cultural perspectives (attitudes, values, and beliefs) and the ways in which people behave. Theories of cultural competence have highlighted five areas in which skills and/or knowledge are needed for effective communication across cultures and subcultures. These are:

- the ability to be open to other cultures;
- knowledge of one's own culture and of other cultures (facts, behaviors, values, attitudes, beliefs, how each culture views the other);
- skills in interpreting interactions with others, with texts and materials in light of existing knowledge and attitudes;
- skills in learning new behaviors by using knowledge and skills in successful interactions with people of other cultures; and
- the ability to use explicit criteria consciously to evaluate the products, practices, and perspectives of other cultures and one's own.

Leadership and advocacy for continuous learning are critical to the development and maintenance of an effective organization. Powerful staff development activities build organizational capacity and reinforce the contributions of staff to system improvements and must be continuously evaluated regarding their effectiveness through a systemic process.

What specifically will we do?

Provide a new Professional Growth Cycle for teachers: Have a professional growth plan developed by each teacher based on time for peer collaboration, observations of other teachers, and opportunities to improve teaching skills.

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Institute "job-embedded" training: Provide staff development within the school, facilitated by secondary resource teachers and school-based elementary teacher staff developers, where teachers will observe each other, critique each other's practices, and engage in collaborative projects within subject disciplines and grade levels.

Create a new culture for professional development: Support the continuous self-assessment, collegial collaboration, and evaluative feedback and critique among teachers and other educators so that the professional growth process is highly valued.

Focus training on specific instructional skills: Provide training in *The Skillful Teacher: Building Your Teaching Skills* model, developed by Research for Better Teaching, Inc., so that teachers can increase their content knowledge, learn to use appropriate strategies for specific situations, and gain understanding of the role of staff attitudes and expectations in shaping student performance.

Assign staff development specialists to each school: Use training experts who will provide schoolwide support for training, demonstration teaching, systemwide collaboration, and benchmarking with other schools, along with strategies on improving attitudes and expectations, instructional outcomes, and data analysis.

Implement a plan for "consulting teachers": In the development of a Peer Assistance and Review Program, phase-in the implementation of "consulting teachers" who will be assigned to provide intensive support and monitoring of new and continuing teachers who are just beginning or still developing their competencies.

Focus all staff on improved teaching: Provide the depth of leadership development and competency improvement for all staff necessary to ensure that the entire workforce is focused explicitly on increased student learning.

Provide training in instructional leadership: Increase training through a Leadership Academy in each area of leadership – vision, instruction, management, collaboration, ethics, student performance, and school improvement – plus a component on attitudes and expectations.

Expand in-school leadership and collaboration: Continue implementation of Quality Management Councils and training for local schools on in-school leadership, collaboration skills, and shared governance.

Link support staff training to educational goals: Ensure that training for supporting services staff at both the local and systemwide levels is linked directly to key results and performance measures identified in local school and office strategic plans.

Provide leadership assessments: Ensure that future principals will be assessed at an "Assessment Center" to determine whether they meet the identified competencies required for school leadership or leadership improvement. Review and revise the evaluation process for principals.

Enhance cross-cultural communication skills: Provide training in communication across cultures based on research and effective approaches and demonstrations.

Redesign staff development: Empower every employee more effectively to assess and meet the needs of the students and stakeholders they serve.

On behalf of the administrators and supervisors of our school system, we reaffirm our commitment to all students who enter our schoolhouse doors. We are dedicated to providing outstanding educational opportunities that increase the achievement of all students and close the existing gap in student achievement.

JANICE MOSTOW, PRESIDENT, MONTGOMERY COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPERVISORY PERSONNEL

Improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap will not only strengthen our school system but will ultimately lead to a stronger and more productive society.
DURINDA ANDERSON, PRINCIPAL, ROCKVILLE HIGH SCHOOL; PRESIDENT-ELECT, SECONDARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS ASSOCIATION

TREND-BENDER:
Broadening the Concept of Literacy

RICH CURRICULUM, EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION

All students need a rich curriculum, effective instruction, and ways of measuring their progress. To be productive citizens of the 21st century, our students must be knowledgeable consumers of information as well as producers of it. Our students will need to cope with an unprecedented deluge of information that will be delivered through means that are, perhaps, unimaginable to us today. The ability to digest, analyze, evaluate, and use information from a variety of sources will be critical. Knowing "how" and "why" and *caring why* may, in fact, be more important than knowing "what."

WHAT DO WE PLAN TO DO?

The workforce of tomorrow will need to be literate in many areas. We need to redefine literacy to meet the needs of a changing world. Of course, students will need to be competent readers, writers, listeners, and speakers. They will need to be literate in the language of mathematics, in data analysis, in the language of electronic communication, and in the uses of technology in their personal and professional lives. They will need to be independent thinkers and problem solvers as they shape tomorrow's world.

Every area of the curriculum must support the intertwined goals of critical thinking and literacy. Each content area at every grade level must be directed toward helping students develop tools that increase their ability to think and communicate through language, mathematics and the sciences, technology, and the arts. A narrow curriculum focused exclusively on reading and mathematics cannot achieve this goal. Students need to know a great deal about their world (past, present, and future) to have something meaningful about each aspect to think and communicate.

Good teaching makes a difference. Our schools must employ competent teaching staff empowered with the knowledge and skills to select the most appropriate instructional strategies for given students in given situations. Every aspect of MCPS curriculum must be rigorous and challenging and provided by staff with high levels of expertise. Our

efforts to promote workforce excellence are clearly tied to student learning.

How can students, parents, and staff know whether students are learning? A system of accountability measures, both quantitative and qualitative, will be part of our plan. At every step along the way, we will be clear about what students should learn, how well they should learn it, and whether or not we as staff and students have done what we set out to do.

WHY DO WE THINK IT WILL WORK?

Research has shown that good teaching is the most important variable in student achievement. Good teaching requires a deliberate, explicit focus on desired outcomes, a clear understanding of what it takes to get there, and tools with which to measure student progress. Students who are struggling benefit from challenging learning experiences, rich learning environments, and concentrated periods of highly-focused instruction. Research also suggests that students need to be motivated learners, recognizing that reading, writing, mathematics, and critical thinking are lifelong skills that lead to personal and workplace success. Students are more likely to achieve learning goals when they and their teachers are able to collect, analyze, and use data to monitor student progress.

Research also has shown that successful students learn or develop strategies that help them learn, develop good work habits, study skills, and thinking skills. Students who can assess their own performance are likely to produce higher quality work.

What specifically will we do?

Audit the curriculum to ensure alignment: Ensure that the curriculum focuses on the essential skills all students need, aligned with state of Maryland learning outcomes and core learning goals, and responds to the best thinking of national experts in each content area.

Audit the mathematics curriculum: Ensure through an external audit that there is a match between the mathematics program and national and international standards. Ensure a capacity to implement rigorous, world-class written curricula in every school.

Improve the development of new curriculum: Implement a process for new curriculum development so that future efforts are aligned with the priorities of the Board of Education, Maryland's Core Learning Goals, and national standards.

Expand the early reading initiative: Extend reading initiative training and materials through Grade 3, and devise a comprehensive monitoring system for its implementation.

Expand the writing program: Create a developmental writing program for Kindergarten through Grade 8.

Help students learn to learn: Teach all students to use effective learning strategies, to develop good work habits, study skills, and habits of mind.

Restructure the Algebra 1 initiative: Make hands-on resources and technology supports available to all students, such as simulation and mathematics modeling software, tutorial software, and audio and visual technology with guided practices and review. Implement a comprehensive monitoring system for its implementation.

Use school-based "literacy teams": Implement a focused literacy program in every school that provides coaching and training for all staff, direct interventions for students, and monitoring of student achievement, and that assures coordination of strategies and curriculum for all students.

The educational initiative to improve student performance and close the achievement gap embodies the mission of our organization to empower the Latino youth in its pursuit of success and fulfillment of dreams. NACOPRW supports and commends this 'Call to Action.'

IRIS R. BROWN,
PAST PRESIDENT

IVONNE G. CERVONI,
PRESIDENT

AURELIS BRAS FERNANDEZ,
PRESIDENT-ELECT

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
PUERTO RICAN WOMEN

All children achieve more when families become involved in their child's education. The efforts to increase parent and family involvement will go a long way toward closing the achievement gap and improving the education of all students.

LINNA M. BARNES,
PRESIDENT,
MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL OF PTAs

Provide technology tools, including equipment: Ensure that instructionally related software, equipment, and corresponding staff development are provided and used to foster critical thinking, reading, and writing skills; multiple paths for learning and communicating; and differentiated instruction.

Bring parents into computer labs: Develop programs that allow parents to use school computer centers to develop technology skills, learn how to support student academic programs, and make connections to other adult education and family supports, including English language development and social or economic services.

For students who are at the beginning and developing levels of literacy proficiency:

Create accelerated programs in reading: Develop short-term interventions at all school levels to accelerate student learning, including Reading Recovery in Grade 1, a formalized reading program for all middle school students who demonstrate the need for explicit reading/writing instruction, and reading coursework for Grades 9 and 10 students who have not yet achieved reading proficiency.

Provide supports for students with little or no schooling: Implement special programs that provide accelerated and condensed content-area instruction and programs for learners of English that focus on the academic language skills needed for content-area learning.

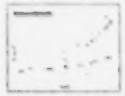
Implement structured tutoring in reading: Implement a program that trains volunteers to help second graders practice and increase their individual reading fluency and comprehension.

Provide site-based summer enrichment in algebra: Use both summer enrichment and intervention programs for middle school students to help them successfully complete algebra by Grade 8 or Grade 9.

Provide targeted mathematics interventions: Provide specific grade-level support for students at high-impact schools.

Offer Algebra 1 recovery: Provide site-based summer Algebra 1B recovery programs for high school students to advance to higher level math instruction.

Use the power of technology to open learning opportunities: Ensure that schools with high numbers of children living in poverty have enough technology to support accelerated instruction and improved achievement.



TREND BENDER:

Reorganizing Assets for School Success

The organizational structure of the school system must be aligned so that teachers and principals get the support they need to assure student and school success. This alignment must ultimately include both the central administration and the internal structure of individual schools.

Reorganization is a necessary change as the school system adapts to new circumstances to remain competitive and successful. Success in private industry depends on strategic decision-making and deployment of resources in a way that delivers products and services to meet customer expectations. Our school system can do no less as it confronts a growing student and community population that has changed dramatically in just 15 years.

WHAT DO WE PLAN TO DO?

The administrative reorganization is designed to support a child-centered learning community. The central office must be more responsive to schools and deliver the services and products principals and teachers need to improve student performance and close the achievement gap. The realignment of resources focuses

on improving teaching and learning and providing the level of staff development necessary to strengthen the capacity of the workforce.

The central administrative reorganization is based on three areas integral to the overall success of the school system:

- Improve school performance and accountability.
- Transform the culture of the school system through organizational development.
- Improve business operations and financial resources.

This will be assessed by stakeholder and customer satisfaction and employee well-being measures for each support function.

WHY DO WE THINK IT WILL WORK?

The restructuring aligns all central office resources with the requirements of the schools. The formation of teams under the leadership of community superintendents will allow flexibility to respond quickly and effectively to school performance needs. Community superintendents will focus resources on priorities that help improve school and student performance. Data will be provided in a user-friendly format to identify priority schools that need assistance and schools whose instructional practices can serve as models.

Student learning improves when there is accountability for student achievement. Accountability requires innovative models related to increased achievement of all students, especially those who struggle. Schools require organized, centralized services to provide training, research-based information and on-site assistance, while relying on the support of the district to make school-level decisions, provided they are in keeping with legal mandates and raise achievement.

What specifically will we do?

Placing schools first: Align all resources of all offices to meet the needs of schools. Offices will share the same goal as each and every school: to improve student performance and close the achievement gap.

Focus resources on teaching and learning: Streamline all central office functions to achieve greater collaboration, efficiency, and effectiveness in responding to the needs of principals and teachers. Eliminate administrative functions that do not support improvements in teaching and learning.

Improve staff development: Focus on providing all staff with the skills for doing the right job to help schools. Ensure that the school system employs highly trained staff with the skills and expertise to provide top-quality instruction in the classroom and excellent support services both in and around the classroom.

Allow greater flexibility: Ensure that all staff can respond quickly and effectively to the needs of schools through teamwork and empowerment that helps staff to be more productive, helpful, and responsive to the needs of the school system.

Conduct action research: Identify replicable designs and strategies for optimizing performance excellence.

Use the Baldrige National Quality Assessment Criteria: Focus and accelerate building the organizational culture around student success goals.

This means giving all students the chance to succeed in college — not only by obtaining a degree but doing so in an efficient and timely manner. Since 80 percent of the jobs of the future will require at least some college education, we must eradicate the skill gap to assure that everyone has the opportunity to participate effectively in the rapidly changing job environment.

CHARLENE R. NUNLEY, PRESIDENT, MONTGOMERY COLLEGE

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Initiative and collaboration are the engines of all real progress. If we can all unselfishly give our best to this effort to improve the education of our children, we will succeed.

BRIAN GIFFORD,
EDUCATION COMMITTEE CHAIR,
MONTGOMERY COUNTY CIVIC FEDERATION

TREND BENDER:

Creating Family- and Community-Friendly Partnerships

Focused and intensive collaboration with the entire community is required to raise the academic achievement of all students while accelerating the achievement of African American and Hispanic students. This premise is reflected in Goal 3 of the Success for Every Student Plan, "Strengthen Productive Partnerships for Education," and repeated in the Board of Education's Academic Priorities, "Create unique, innovative, family- and community-friendly partnerships to improve academic results."

WHAT DO WE PLAN TO DO?

Families are our children's first teachers. Today, however, many parents are finding it increasingly difficult to participate meaningfully in their children's education because of language and cultural differences, childcare, demands of work, and just not knowing what to do. If we are to succeed in our mission to prepare all of our children for the future, we must find ways to give parents the information and skills they need to be equal partners in their children's education.

Parents must know both the academic program and social components of the school and should be involved in professional development activities as participants and leaders. We must foster shared decision-making among parents, administrators, staff, and other members of the community to improve the quality of teaching and learning. It is only through mutually beneficial and respectful relationships that effective collaboration will occur. That our school system is more like a maze to be mastered than an inviting learning community is cited as one of the reasons that parents are not as involved as they would like to be in their children's schools.

Through a partnership with the county government and our involvement in the Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth, and Families, many at-risk children and their families access an array of resources and services that address the social and familial problems that undermine academic success.

The complexity of raising and educating children today requires support from all parts of the community. By collaborating with colleges and universities, partnering with advocacy groups and civic organizations, and tapping the vast resources of the business community, our school system strengthens its capacity to prepare all of our students to become productive members of society and meet the challenging demands of the future.

WHY DO WE THINK IT WILL WORK?

Nothing is more important to success in schools than the quality of the relationships between and among students, staff, and parents. Parents whose involvement is actively sought by teachers have more positive attitudes about their children's schools and teachers. Research tells us that when parents are involved in their children's education, students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status; their ethnic, racial and/or linguistic background; or their parents' educational level.

Many parents want to help their children learn but are not sure what to do. Two-way communication between families and schools is the foundation for all other forms of parental involvement. Effective schools provide information and ideas to families about academic standards, curriculum and instruction, and school policies and procedures. Family, school, and community are key elements in the educational process, and all three parts of the system must work together for this process to be successful.

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What specifically will we do?

- **Establish a systemwide Parent-Community Council:** Ensure that representatives of all segments of the community are involved in the design of a plan for improved parent and community outreach, education, and involvement.
- **Create a process to encourage parent partnerships:** Coordinate and align a systemwide information exchange for parents using new and traditional communication techniques, such as a parenting link on the MCPS web site, a family-school partnership newsletter, parent tips for principals' newsletters, and a family-school calendar.
- **Support the Collaboration Council's Community Kids:** Foster full school-system participation in a community-based, integrated system of care for children and families, with staff and community members working together to identify and develop resources that support family well-being and student achievement.
- **Implement a system of accountability:** Align data collection to measure the effectiveness of family and student supports in improving learning.
- **Bring services to parents:** Create a mobile parenting unit that will bring parenting workshops to neighborhoods and work sites.
- **Assess parent satisfaction and suggestions:** Measure and evaluate the family-friendly quotient of schools and offices through a "Family-Friendly Feedback" form.
- **Expand partnerships with the community:** Create a *Reaching Across the County* initiative that will involve the NAACP Parents' Council and Hispanic parents working together on advocacy and empowerment strategies.
- **Pilot the Comer Program:** Initiate the Dr. James P. Comer School Development Program in three to five schools to provide another approach to school management, based on principles of child and adolescent growth and development and on interpersonal relationships.
- **Expand business involvement:** Create a Resource Opportunity and Development Unit to involve business leaders in identifying important learning outcomes, provide opportunities to apply school studies in workplace settings, and link other business resources with individual school needs.
- **Improve language translations of information:** Provide information in a language that can be understood by parents, and ensure that all programs implement communication links that respect the home language and the diverse cultural backgrounds of families.

We shall establish a mentor's program with successful Hispanic people who achieved goals socially and economically and can now help at schools with great concentrations of Hispanic students.

EMILIO PERCHE RIVAS, SPANISH SPEAKING COMMUNITY OF MARYLAND, INC.

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Bridging the gap is essential to maximizing the potential of every student regardless of their background. As educators, we must be caring, sensitive, and creative in reaching all of the communities represented in our schools. Every ethnicity and religion counts.
SAMIRA HUSSEIN, MUSLIM/ARAB COMMUNITY

Closing the Achievement Gap:
STUDENT BY STUDENT, SCHOOL BY SCHOOL, CLUSTER BY CLUSTER

We do not have all the answers. But like many of the most vexing problems we have faced in Montgomery County, the answers are likely to be among us – we just haven't discovered them yet. While this call to action speaks to a large number of school system changes and trend bending initiatives, built on a solid base of proven best practices, we must also inspire, promote, and fund a network of locally-generated projects. The creativity, wisdom, and determination of students, school staffs, parents, and business and community groups must be mobilized at the student and neighborhood level. That is where the potential to discover, address, and finally resolve the achievement gap problem is the greatest.

We will fund and support a network of local "gap ender" projects that show promise for fundamentally improving and accelerating student performance. Parents, students, teachers, support staff, neighbors, administrators, and community groups will be able to request funds and implement their own promising ideas and plans. Requests will be submitted to a review panel comprising university professors, research scientists, community leaders, parents, and educators who will determine which projects get funded and why.

Approved projects will be measured rigorously against clear standards related to student achievement. Those that prove effective in closing the gap, even if only for a handful of students, will be replicated as programs in other locations, neighborhoods, classrooms, schools, or clusters. These, too, will be measured rigorously against standards, and if they collectively prove effective in closing the gap, they will be written into policy with clearly related strategies for thoughtful implementation across Montgomery County. Indeed, an idea born in the mind

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of a single student, teacher, or parent may lead to a movement for substantial change in how we educate our children.

One example is Sharp Street, developed by the Sharp Street Baptist Church community of Olney in collaboration with Sherwood High School. Started as a volunteer project to provide direct academic support and nurturing to high school students suspended for disciplinary problems, it has now reached program status in six different high school communities across Montgomery County. The program retains its local intensity and appeal and will be measured to determine if a policy and strategy for promoting this program in all communities would be effective.

We envision numerous gap-ending projects that will focus on entirely different areas from Sharp Street, yet might achieve similarly positive results. These might include:

- Parent help groups focused on explaining academic standards, course requirements, and course sequencing starting in pre-kindergarten and continuing through high school.

- Secondary student course evaluations broken out by race and published.

- Teacher/adult–student relationship-building and social connection programs.

- Student-to-student support groups to eliminate isolation and increase participation of African American and Hispanic students in Honors and Advanced Placement classes.

- Sustained adult-to-student coaching that focuses on critical and relevant academic feedback.

My effort to improve the academic performance of students is to implement my program Education 2000. This program works with the school, student, parent, and community working together to meet the goal of academic excellence for all students. This program helped my son Jose Vargas to get the Rhodes Scholarship.

ELIDA VARGAS-CARRASCO,
"EDUCACION 2000" PROGRAM,
RADIO AMERICA

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Success for every student is contingent on success for every parent and every teacher. I support the Superintendent's initiative to empower all of us.

GINNY GONG,
PAST CHAIRPERSON,
GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR NEW AMERICANS

Next Steps

The challenge is clear – we must not pause for even a moment in the life of even one child. Raising achievement for all students and closing the gap by race and ethnicity are not simple problems with easy answers. Other school districts are addressing similar issues and making progress. So can we.

Our call to action is based on defining the problem, having a clear set of goals, investing in a skilled workforce and team approach through staff development with our teachers and other staff, and making sure we use data to form a true system of assessment and accountability. Our mission is to stay focused on the challenges ahead and take the most direct approach in solving the problems that confront our school system.

We have reached a point in our school system's history where we must not wait any longer. It is time to meet the challenge and to reengineer our work in a collaborative and accountable process that is based on facts, "just in time data," and the very best in thinking, teaching, learning, programs, partnerships, and professional development.

Our next task is to develop the implementation plan in coordination with the capital budget, the capital improvements program, and the operating budget. Our view will be for changes this year and next year, with a phased-in process over the next several years with major changes and investments. In the meantime, we ask everyone to use their minds, hearts, hands, and voices to take up the challenge of working together on behalf of all children in the Montgomery County Public Schools.

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Research Foundations for Our Call to Action

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"No matter how long you've been a principal, your focal point is raising student achievement. Supporting the concept of diversity as an educational benefit will motivate principals and staff to do whatever it takes to close the gap and make all children successful in all our schools.

ROBIN WEAVER,
PRINCIPAL,
HARMONY HILLS
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL;
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John Hoven
Samira Hussein

Thomas Israel

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Frances Jones
Jennie Jones
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Matthew Kamins
Joan Karasik
Gene Kijowski
LaVerne Kimball
Harry Klugel
Galen Kreiser
Donald Kress

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Charla Levine
Georgia Lewis
Michael Lin
B. Jane Linthicum
Dick Lipsky
Cynthia Loeb
Janet Lottero
Jill Lyons

Judith Madden
Maria Malagon
Jean Mallon
Sally Marchessault
Susan Marks
Beverly McAnulty
David McIlwain
Darlene Merry
Myriam Met
Betty Montgomery
Jane Morison
Janice Mostow
Judie Muntner
Susan Murray
David McIlwain

Linda Natale
Rebecca Newman
Roscoe Nix
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Phyllis Parks-Robinson
Emilio Perche Rivas
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Paul Pinsky
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Stephen Poor
Brian J. Porter
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Paula Rehr
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Susan Richardson
Grace Rivera-Oven
Cristina Riva-Chevez
James Robinson
David Rodich
Katie Rosenberg
Ruby Rubens
Helen Ryan

June Sampson
Brenda Schaub
Stan Schaub
Douglas Schiffman
Jack Schoendorfer
Steven Seleznow
Susan Sellers
Ruth Sernak
Roberta Shulman
Jody Silvio
Mark Simon
Inger Simpson
Helen L. Sipe
Kathy Sloan

JoEllen Smallwood
John W. Smith
Mary Helen Smith
Marshall Spatz
Kimberly Statham
Frank Stetson
Barron Stroud
Inger Swimpson
Charles Sye

James T. Terrill
George B. Thomas, Sr.

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Betty Valdes
Danilo Vargas
Elida Vargas-Carrasco
Edisa Vega
Renee Vongus

Sandra Walker
Vickie Walter
Jerry D. Weast
Robin Weaver
Sandra Weintraub
Beatrice Weiss
Brad Westpfahl
Cheryl Wilhoyte
William P. Wilhoyte
Clare Wilson
Melissa Woods
Teresa Wright

Kathleen Yorro

Barbara Zelley